

## BEANS AND RICE

In the snap and sizzle  
of hot oil, onions  
frying, babies  
crawling on the floor, I  
see her only, seven-  
teen, skin dark  
as caramel, moving  
between the kitchen  
stove and table,  
brown hand riding on  
the jut of her hip,  
black hair loosened,  
bending as she stirs  
beans in a blackened pot  
over the blue blossom  
of gas-fire, wearing  
Pablo's stretched sweat-  
shirt that falls loosely  
over her snug jeans.  
All summer I have seen  
her at the window staring  
at the boys pitching  
quarters on Franklin Street.  
When she serves my beans  
on a bed of yellow  
rice the hairs on her arm  
brush my cheek with  
the scent of olive oil and  
I notice her mouth is red,  
lips thick like my own  
sister's after sleep.

## OGDEN AVENUE

After dark  
they'd come  
for Toby's mom.  
Wedge  
their wide  
white-walled  
Eldorados  
and Lincolns  
between the rusted  
Chevys and Fords.  
Uptown men,  
red-nosed and  
puffy cheeked,  
soft bellies pressed  
against chromed  
steering wheels,  
flat asses sinking  
deeper into  
their plush  
leather seats,  
waiting for Rita  
to pull back  
the curtains,  
lean her pocked  
face out  
into the yellow  
streetlight,  
and one by  
one, wave them  
upstairs.

— John D. Bargowski Sr.

Phillipsburg NJ

## TWO LABORERS AND MRS. GRANDMA AND THE MYSTERIOUS LEVITATING MACHINE

I used to install carpet to make an  
honest dollar. It was back-breaking  
work and I always came home from a  
job tired and sore. But I'd get up  
the next day to go through it all  
again not because I enjoyed it but  
because it put food in my gut and  
a roof over my head. I did this for  
four years before escaping into a



clerk/typist job with the federal government. As I now sit here at work typing this out on government time and on this government machine I'll never forget the most memorable customer I ever had as a carpet installer. The job was in a really nice apartment where lived an ancient widow whose hands & head shook slightly all of the time. After my partner, John, and I started to move the furniture from the living room to an outside patio area she begged us to stop. "Do you have to move it all out?" she said. "I'll never be able to remember how all of it goes back." John explained it to her. "Ma'am, we gotta move it all out so we can pull up the old carpet and padding and replace it with the new carpet and padding." She seemed puzzled. Her hands and head shook a little more. "You mean to tell me," she said, "that you don't have a machine that'll raise the furniture up into the air while you work underneath it?" John and I looked at each other in disbelief and rolled our eyes. Before going on with the job we decided to diagram her apartment on a sheet of paper and indicate with abbreviations (CT for coffee table, C for couch, etc. ...) where every piece of furniture sat so we could put her world back together the way it was before we took it apart.

#### PUSSY-WHIPPED

The cat came over to me and rubbed the side of his head against my leg. He purred. I paid Maxx no mind at all. I kept my eye on the hockey game.

But the small monster had another plan of attack. He started talking trash.

"Meow, meow. Meoow. Meeow. Meeooww. Mee-eooww. Meeoow."

I looked down at him & said, "Shut the fuck up you little bastard."

He hissed and swiped at me with his paw.